

VZCZCXR09322

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #2019 1701145  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 191145Z JUN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1767  
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002019

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2017

TAGS: IR IZ KISL PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: SHIA CLERIC BAHR AL-ALOOM DISCUSSES SAMARRA BOMBING, U.S.-IRAN DIALOGUE WITH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Highly respected Shia cleric from Najaf and former Iraqi Governing Council member Seyyid Muhammed Bahr al-Aloom met with the Ambassador June 15. Bahr al-Aloom shared the Ambassador's optimism concerning the positive stance taken by Iraqi political and religious leaders following the June 13 bombing of the al-Askariya mosque in Samarra. Bahr al-Aloom complained that Iraq was caught in a fight between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and he called for the U.S. to broker an agreement between the two. Highlighting the importance Iraqis place on the U.S.-Iranian dialogue, he argued that negative Iranian interference in Iraq would be ameliorated if Tehran had "assurances" that the U.S. was not a threat. End Summary.

-----  
Positive Reactions to Samarra Bombing  
-----

¶12. (C) Bahr al-Aloom thanked the Ambassador for President Bush's statement condemning the second Samarra bombing June 13. He noted the positive stance of the Najaf religious authorities in using their substantial influence over Shia to call for calm and self-restraint. Bahr al-Aloom claimed he had a role in convincing Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to refrain from any statements implying U.S. responsibility for the attack. Bahr al-Aloom also praised Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and characterized his visit to the holy site after the attack as a brave step. The Ambassador and Bahr al-Aloom agreed that the consistent response by the political and religious leadership, and the cohesion of Iraqis, was a reason for optimism.

-----  
Must Begin Rebuilding  
-----

¶13. (C) "We are still in shock and containing our emotions," said Bahr al-Aloom. In order to make use of the relative calm, Bahr al-Aloom asked that the U.S. pressure the GOI to secure the road to Samarra and begin rebuilding the al-Askariya shrine quickly. The U.S., he said, also has a responsibility to protect Iraqi holy sites. On this the Ambassador disagreed, insisting that the responsibility was entirely Iraqi. Nonetheless, the Ambassador said that the U.S. was ready to assist and that President Bush had told PM Maliki that the U.S. is prepared to finance the shrine's reconstruction.

-----  
Iraq Caught Between Iran and Arab Neighbors  
-----

¶14. (C) Bahr al-Aloom complained that Iraq is caught between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and that until an understanding was

reached between the two, Iraq would remain "only a ball to kick around." Iraqis do not want to be under the control of anyone -- not Iran, Saudi Arabia, or the United States, he said. Bahr al-Aloom suggested that the U.S. broker an understanding between Saudi Arabia and Iran. There will be no stability in Iraq," he said, "until the Arabs and Iran stop what they are doing on the ground." The U.S. maintains the position that the neighbors need to play a more positive role in supporting Iraqi security and prosperity, the Ambassador told Bahr al-Aloom. The Ambassador pointed to the nefarious behavior of Syria and Iran in Iraq as particularly harmful to Iraqi peace and security.

-----  
U.S.-Iran Dialogue  
-----

15. (C) Bahr al-Aloom said that Iraqis placed high hopes in the U.S.-Iran dialogue on Iraq launched May 28. He said the talks were important to "lessen the pressure" on Iran and relieve its fear and anxiety about the U.S. The Ambassador replied that he found it hard to understand why the Iranians would need assurances from the U.S., which had eliminated its main rivals, Saddam and the Taliban. The Ambassador noted Iranian efforts in support of militias and terrorist activities that resulted in the deaths of Iraqi and Coalition Forces. Iran acts as if it wants to turn Iraq into another Lebanon, the Ambassador told Bahr al-Aloom, asking how could Iran believe it was in its own interest to destabilize Iraq. Bahr al-Aloom insisted, nevertheless, that Iran could be convinced to stop its negative interference if it only had more "assurances" from the U.S.

CROCKER